

## What Happens After the Report

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A report of suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation is not an accusation. It is the link to services for families who would not voluntarily seek the help they may desperately need. When an incident of suspected child/vulnerable adult abuse/neglect/exploitation is reported, “taking action” is mandated by law.

State law also mandates that, promptly after receiving a report of suspected child/vulnerable adult abuse/neglect/exploitation, the local Department of Family Services must make a thorough investigation to protect the welfare of the child/vulnerable adult. DFS and law enforcement may work jointly or law enforcement may take the lead role of the investigation.

Depending on the report the caseworker has three processes to determine the best outcome for the child/vulnerable adult.

- Investigation
- Assessment
- Prevention Services

### What is an Investigation?

Investigation is a process that will result in a finding of either “Substantiated” or “Unsubstantiated”.

The Wyoming Department of Family Services has the legal authority and obligation to assess, investigate and evaluate reports of child/vulnerable adult abuse and neglect and to provide services when needed. During the early investigation stage, caseworkers are responsible for determining:

Whether abuse or neglect has likely occurred;

Whether there is immediate danger or risk to the child/vulnerable adult;

What the motivation, capacity and intent of the alleged perpetrator is; and

What the ability of a non-offending caregiver is to protect the child/vulnerable adult in the immediate future.

During the investigation a caseworker:

- Checks for other reports of abuse/neglect/exploitation;
- Talks face-to-face with the child/vulnerable adult involved;
- Checks the child/vulnerable adult for injuries or signs of abuse/neglect/exploitation;

- Checks the child/vulnerable adult's home and where the alleged abuse/neglect/exploitation took place;
- Talks face-to-face with the child's parents or with the vulnerable adult and their caregiver;
- Talks with any other person who may have abused/neglected/exploited the child/vulnerable adult;
- And talk with anyone else who may have information pertaining to the allegation.

Sometimes the caseworker may also:

- Talk with other people who know about the child/vulnerable adult's care, such as doctors, teachers, other relatives, etc;
- Talk to and observe other children/vulnerable adults in the home;
- Arrange for a medical or psychological examination of the child/vulnerable adult if appropriate.

After the caseworker is satisfied from the information learned through the investigation the caseworker will determine if the allegations are "Substantiated" or "Unsubstantiated."

If the report is "Substantiated", the name of the person who abused the child/vulnerable adult will be entered on the Wyoming Central Registry of Child/Vulnerable Adult Abuse and Neglect. *For more information on the Central Registry please visit our website at <http://dfsweb.state.wy.us/centralregistry.html> .*

Substantiated investigations are also referred to the county/district attorney for possible legal action. For a vulnerable adult substantiation licensing agencies will be notified.

If the report is determined "Unsubstantiated," this means there was not sufficient information regarding the allegation to confirm abuse/neglect/exploitation based on the state's legal criteria. Some cases are classified as unsubstantiated and voluntary services are provided to the child/vulnerable adult, their families and/or caregivers.

### **What is an Assessment?**

The assessment is a process to determine whether there are safety issues to be addressed and to provide services and strategies to help the child/vulnerable adult maximize his or their ability to resolve and avoid future risks.

### **What are Preventive Services?**

Preventive services may be made available even though there appears to be no abuse/neglect/exploitation.